

Court Action

The first hearing in any truancy action is the “preliminary hearing.” At the preliminary hearing, the court will hear the evidence from the school district, the parents and student to determine whether the truancy allegation is more likely than not true. If true, the court will enter a written order directing the student to go to school. The court may also enter other orders to compel compliance with the truancy law, such as obtaining a substance abuse evaluation.

If the student successfully obeys the court order and goes to school without any unexcused absences, they most likely will not be called back to court for any additional hearings.

However, students and parents who willfully violate the court order and continue to have unexcused absences will be summoned back to court for a “contempt hearing.” When a student or parent is held in contempt, the court may impose a coercive sanction to correct the student’s attendance issues. The court may order a student to write a report, do community service, or spend time in juvenile detention.

The court may require a parent to do community service or even be issued fines of \$25.00 for each day of their child’s truancy. Children are entitled to legal counsel once they face the threat of confinement.



Depending on the student’s attendance after the contempt hearing, future review hearings may be necessary to review the student’s progress towards his/her attendance goals.

Questions

The truancy process can be complex and the laws unclear, however there are people who can help you understand the process. If you have questions, or want more information:

1. **Call your school district.**
2. **Call the Prosecutor’s Office at (206) 296-9035.**
3. **Call Juvenile Court at (206) 205-2527 or 205-9716.**
4. **Go to the Prosecutor’s Office Web page at www.metrokc.gov/proatty and click on Truancy Talk.**

This information is available upon request in alternative formats including large print, Braille, and audio cassette by calling 206-296-9067 (voice and relay service for TTY) or e-mail us at becky.gifford@metrokc.gov

 Printed on recycled paper in the King County Print Shop.  10060SM1.QXD

Keeping Kids in School

A Parent’s Guide to the Becca Bill



A publication of the
King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office

In the State of Washington, it is the law that all children ages 8 to 18 attend school. It is the responsibility of everyone to ensure that no child falls through the cracks.

As parents you have a very difficult job of trying to not only live your life the best way you know how, but also manage the life of your children. There exists no greater challenge than addressing the many difficulties that will confront your children as they grow. However, one issue in particular has the potential to affect them for many years after they leave your home, their education.

The Becca Bill

Washington's truancy law, often termed "the Becca Bill," is intended to curb school truancy before it becomes a problem. The law requires many things of schools, but only requires one thing of students: attend school. If a student does not attend school the law requires the school district to take action.

■ One (1) or Two (2) Unexcused Absences

After a single unexcused absence the school is required to contact the parents, which is generally done by phone or letter. After a second unexcused absence, the school is required to schedule a conference with the parent and student to discuss solutions to the truancy.

■ Five (5) Unexcused Absences

If a student accumulates five (5) unexcused absences in a month, the school may take more intense steps to end the truancy. The school may file a petition with the King County Superior Court, enter into a written truancy agreement with the family, refer the family to a "community truancy board" if one exists, or take other reasonable action. A community truancy board is comprised of citizen volunteers who help to resolve individual truancy cases.

■ Seven (7) and Ten (10) unexcused absences

Court action is required when a student accumulates seven (7) absences in a month or ten (10) in a year. The truancy law requires that school districts file a petition in Superior Court against the student, parent, or both. After a petition is filed several things may happen with a student's case. Depending on the circumstances of each individual case, a student's petition may not be immediately heard in juvenile court.

Truancy Class

A case may first be sent to a "truancy class." The King County Superior Court truancy class is an opportunity for students and parents to avoid going to the court if the parties enter into an agreement that student will attend school. At the class the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney will discuss the Becca Bill and the legal and social consequences of future truancy. In addition, trained facilitators will speak separately with the students and parents on what may be causing the truancy, effective communication, and what the school district can do to help remedy the truancy. At the end of the class the parent and student will work with the facilitators to draft an agreement about specific things each person can do to help get the student back in school full time.